

Being Blessed
Luke 6:17–26
Sunday, February 16, 2025

Let us pray: Lord, open our eyes and ears and hearts and minds to you Word, that your Word might open our eyes and ears and hearts and minds to others, in Christ. Amen.

About a month ago, I was planning out all of the sermons through Easter; looking at the lectionary to see what scripture readings I would be preaching on and what the themes would be. Sometimes that's hard, and I have to spend a lot of time reading and thinking about it and praying about it. Today was really easy. Because when I looked at the lectionary, I saw that the reading was the Beatitudes, this series of blessings that Jesus proclaims. And I knew that this was the Sunday after the Super Bowl, so even before I knew that the Eagles would be playing in it (and winning), I knew one thing that was going to happen. No matter who was playing in it, as soon as the game was over and they interviewed players from the winning team, *someone* was going to say something along the lines of, "I'm just so blessed. We worked so hard for this all year. We overcame so much. I just want to give thanks to God, because God has really blessed us."

So I was sitting there watching it, and sure enough, as soon as the game was over, they put a microphone in front of Eagles coach Nick Sirianni, and he said, "God has blessed us very much. God gave us all the talents to be able to get here, so first and foremost, thanks to God." And don't get me wrong, that's a great answer. That's the kind of answer that you can give, win or lose. "God has blessed us and given us all the talents to be able to get here." I don't think God cares who wins a football game (except for this time). But God *does* care about the people *playing* the game, just like God cares about you and me. God has given *them* gifts and abilities, and I think God likes seeing *all of us* make the most of the gifts that God has given us; *use them* to glorify God. So, no problem with that answer.

A quick aside, I actually think Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts gave the *best* answer. The game ended, they put a microphone in front of him, asked him how it feels to be a champion, and he said, “God is greater than the highest highs and the lowest lows.” I feel like he would have given that exact same answer, win or lose.

Usually, you never hear that answer come from players on the *losing* team. You never hear *them* say, “We worked so hard for this. We overcame so much. God has really blessed us.” You hardly ever hear players on the losing team say that. I think that is because we live in a culture where blessings are reserved for *winners*. The people who are wealthy and healthy and successful and happy, *those* are the people that God has blessed, right? Most of us would not look at someone living on the streets and say, “God has really blessed them.” Or someone who is having a really rough time with cancer or Alzheimer’s or an addiction, “God has really blessed them.” The person who has lost everything in a California wildfire, “God has really blessed them.” Our culture looks at the people who have *good things*, and we say, “God has really blessed *them*.”

But that is *not* what Jesus says. Jesus announces God’s blessing on the poor and the hungry and the mourning and the despised. He says that *they* are the ones God blesses, because they are the ones who *need it*.

In looking at who Jesus blesses here, we have to start by recognizing that this is not the version of the Beatitudes that many people are familiar with. Most people who are familiar with the Beatitudes are familiar with *Matthew’s* account. In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus says,

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

In *Luke's* gospel, Jesus says, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” There is a difference between being *poor in spirit* and being *poor*. He says, “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.” There is a difference between being hungry for *righteousness* and being *hungry*. And Luke's gospel includes not just *blessings* but *woes*. “Woe to you who are rich. Woe to you who are full now. Woe to you who are laughing now. Woe to you when all speak well of you.” We'll come back to those.

There is a sense in which Matthew focuses more on the *spiritual* condition, the spiritual state and needs of the people, while Luke focuses more on the *physical* condition and the physical needs of the people. You can even see a difference in *where* Jesus announces these blessings in the two gospels. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus announces these blessings from a *mountain*, to show that the people are receiving these blessings, these teachings *from God*, just like Moses and the people of Israel received the commandments from God on a mountain. Matthew has Jesus positioned *above* everyone else. Where do we typically say that the “spiritual things” are? They are from *above*.

But in Luke's gospel, Jesus does not announce these blessings from a *mountain*, but from a *level place*. Luke says, “He came down with them and stood on a level place...Then he looked up at his disciples and said...” Jesus is not announcing these blessings from “on high.” Rather, in Luke's gospel, he is on the same level with the people, even *looking up* at them.

So which is it? Does God bless the *poor* or the *poor in spirit*? Does God bless the *hungry* or those who hunger and thirst for *righteousness*? Is God concerned with the *spiritual* condition and needs of the

people, or is God concerned with the *physical* condition and needs of the people? Is God *above* us, or is God *on the same level* with us? Which one of these is *right*?

They *both* are. God blesses the poor *and* the poor in spirit. God blesses the hungry *and* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. God cares about our spiritual *and* physical needs. God is above us, on high, *and* God has come down to our level in Jesus Christ. Even though these two versions are very different, they were *both* included in scripture. And the people who put the Bible together didn't just *miss* this or make a mistake. They *knew* about this difference, and they included both of them anyway. They didn't try to change them or harmonize them. Because – big picture – whether you are *poor* or poor in *spirit*, you *need* the blessing of God. Whether you are *hungry* or hungry and thirsty for *righteousness* (the Greek word there also means *justice*; if you are *hungering* and *thirsting* for *justice*), you *need* the blessing of God.

The Beatitudes are the announcement of God's blessing upon all those who are hurting, broken, struggling, rejected, hated, and taken advantage of. They are promises to everyone who is suffering in this world – *however* you are suffering, whether spiritually, physically, mentally, or emotionally – that God *sees* you, and God *loves* you, God is *with* you, God has something *better* for you, God is intent on your thriving. The blessing of God is poured out upon all those who *need* the blessing of God. Jesus said, "It's not the *healthy* who need a doctor, but the *sick*. I came, not for the *righteous* (why would *they* need me? They're already righteous!), but for *sinners*; for the hurting, the broken, the sick." This is *good news* for those who *need* good news!

Where do *you* need that good news? Where, in *your* life, are you hurting or struggling or suffering and *in need* of God's blessing? Because the promise that we have from Jesus is that God will meet you there.

Now, Jesus also announces this series of *woes*, “Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.” This tends to make people a little uncomfortable. Maybe that’s why we focus more on *Matthew’s* account than on *Luke’s*, because Matthew doesn’t include this. If this *does* make you uncomfortable, if you bristle against it or don’t like it, I would first encourage you to stop and ask yourself *why* it makes you uncomfortable. It *might* be because we feel *convicted* by it. And if that’s the case, then something about our lives needs to change. Or it might just be because we take these words at face value and don’t fully understand the *meaning* behind them.

These is a sense in which Jesus is saying here, “Material satisfaction will not last, so what are you putting your trust and your hope in?” You have money now, but that can eventually run out. You are full now, but eventually you are going to be hungry again. You are laughing now, but you are inevitably going to be sad at some point. People might be speaking well of you now, but that can change. The things of this world will not satisfy forever, they do not last, so what are we investing our lives in?

The thinking among many theologians is that Jesus is not just condemning people for having food or money. That wouldn’t make sense. Jesus says, “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled,” but then Jesus says, “Woe to you who are full?” So God is going to *bless* them just to condemn them? That’s not what’s going on here. Rather, Jesus is talking about people who have those things *at the expense of someone else*. Woe to you who are rich *at the expense* of those who are poor. Woe to you who are full *at the expense* of those who are hungry. Woe to you who are laughing *at the expense* of those who are weeping. Are we helping the poor, or are we helping ourselves? Are we feeding the hungry, or are we filling ourselves? Are we comforting others, or are we comforting ourselves?

It is important to note that these woes are not curses or condemnations, they are *warnings*. If the blessings are an announcement that something *good* is coming, then the woes are announcements that something *bad* is coming, *if we do not change*. This is a wake up call to Jesus' listeners that we need to take care of *others* instead of just taking care of *ourselves*. Jesus is calling us to live with attention and generosity and love and care toward others, *especially* those who are poor and hungry and mourning and excluded, just like *God* is attentive and generous and loving and caring toward them. If *God* is with the poor and the hungry and the suffering, then *we* should be with them, too.

These woes are not meant to make us feel bad or guilty. They are meant to be a call to awareness and action. Just as Jesus is on the same level as others here, he is calling us to help create a more level world. He is not blessing some people at the expense of others; that is exactly what he is speaking *against* here. He is saying, "Those of you who are down, God is going to raise you up, and those of you who are high, God is going to bring you down, so that you are all on the same level." That is the way that the *justice* of God works. No one has too much, no one has too little, everyone has what they need, because in this world, there is *enough* for *everyone*, if we allow it.

The question that Jesus is asking here is, "Are we living for God and our neighbors, or are we living for ourselves? Are we seeking blessings for ourselves, or are we seeking to bless others?" If we *have* money and food and joy, then we are *already blessed*, and we need to bless *others*, so that we can all have what we need to live the fullness of life.

There is a saying that God comforts us where we are disturbed, and God disturbs us where we are comfortable. That is exactly what Jesus is doing here. Wherever you are disturbed or distressed or struggling in your life, God is there with you to comfort you. And wherever we have gotten too comfortable, God is there with us to shake us out of that and open our eyes and our ears and our hearts

and our minds and our hands to the needs of others. The good news is that wherever you are in life, God is there with you, blessing you so that you can bless others. Amen.